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ABSTRACT

An emerging family constellation is the family headed by a "single mother by choice," a structure in which both single marital status and parental status are chosen. This study was conducted to determine whether single mothers by choice (N=12) differed significantly from inwedlock mothers (N=18) regarding their childbearing decisions. Both groups of mothers completed the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), the Internal Control Index (ICI) and the Norbeck Social Support Questionnaire (NSSQ). Single mothers by choice and inwedlock mothers were compared on the impact of the cultural forces of persistence (sex-role orientation and locus of control) on the childbearing decision-making process components (the desire to parent and professional concerns), and on the structural forces of persistence on the childbearing decision-making components (social support and economics), rather than on the forces of origination of the variant lifestyle. The findings revealed that inwedlock and single-by-choice mothers differed more by the cultural than by the structural forces of persistence. (NB)

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SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE AND INWEDLOCK MOTHERS:
SEX-ROLE ORIENTATION, LOCUS OF CONTROL, AND SOCIAL SUPPORT*

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SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE AND INWEDLOCK MOTHERS:
SEX-ROLE ORIENTATION, LOCUS OF CONTROL, AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

Abstract

Single mothers by choice and inwedlock mothers are compared on: (a) the impact of the cultural forces of persistence (sex-role orientation and locus of control) on the childbearing decision-making process components (the desire to parent and professional concerns); and, (b) the structural forces of persistence on the childbearing decision-making components (social support and economics), rather than on the forces of origination of the variant lifestyle. A series of ANOVAs and MANOVAs were performed on scores from the Bem Sex-Role Inventory, the Internal Control Index, and the Norbeck Social Support Questionnaire. The inwedlock and single-by-choice mothers differed more by the cultural (sex-role orientation and locus of control), rather than the structural, forces of persistence.

Key Words: Single mothers by choice, sex-roles, locus of control, social support systems, origination and persistence

SINGLE MOTHERS BY CHOICE AND INWEDLOCK MOTHERS:

SEX-ROLE ORIENTATION, LOCUS OF CONTROL, AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

INTRODUCTION

An emerging family constellation is the family headed by a "single mother by choice" (Single Mothers by Choice, Inc., 1977), a structure in which both single marital status and parental status are chosen. The definition and characteristics of single mothers by choice are unclear because this group has usually been incorporated into various other demographic categories, including those containing accidental teenage pregnancies and unplanned pregnancies to unmarried women of all ages who view this experience as a temporary one as they purposefully pursue attainment of a marital relationship. Single mothers by choice, however, view the single parenting experience as a probably permanent, viable, freely chosen, and healthy lifestyle.

Merritt and Steiner (1984), in their exploratory study, as well as Single Mothers by Choice, Inc., define a single mother by choice as a mature, independent woman who makes a conscious and deliberate decision to have a child outside the bonds of marriage by means of conception through sexual activity (with or without the donor/father's knowledge), artificial insemination, or adoption. This decision-making process, whose mechanisms operate according to social exchange theory (Levinger & Moles, 1979; Thibaut & Kelly, 1959), includes a variety of factors acting as pushes and pulls, including the desire to parent, professional concerns, the availability of support systems, and economics (Merritt & Steiner, 1984) in an attempt to maximize interpersonal rewards and minimize interpersonal costs regarding the parental role.

Three levels of "choice" are involved in the childbearing decision-making process of single mothers by choice: (a) "active choice" (deliberate actions leading to pregnancy, i.e., charting ovulation, picking a particular man as the donor/father, arranging for an adoption); (b) "passive choice" (foregoing the use of birth control, while inviting a pregnancy--i.e., a "welcome accident"); and (c) "after choice" (women who were actively trying not to get pregnant, but who chose to keep their child rather than abort or give it up for adoption) (Merritt & Steiner, 1984). In order to attempt a clear understanding of the interaction between societal changes and the opportunity for deliberately choosing this variant lifestyle, as well as understanding the personal characteristics of the women themselves, it is essential that the active and passive levels of choice be separated from the after choice category. It is the active choice and the passive choice women that serve as the research focus for this study.

MISCLASSIFICATION INTO THE DEFICIT SINGLE-PARENT PERSPECTIVE

Peter Winch (1958) states in The Idea of a Social Science:

...To understand the activities of an individual scientific investigator we must take into account two sets of relations: first, his relation to the phenomena which he investigates; second, his relation to his fellow-scientists. Both of these are essential to the sense of saying that he is 'detecting regularities' or 'discovering uniformities' (pp. 60-61).

Although major concepts are understood by a social scientist in relation to the rules governing social science investigation, it is the rules comprising the human activity itself that determine what is to count as "doing the

same kind of thing" in relation to activities of a particular social nature (Winch, 1958).

Winch identifies a concern regarding the way single mothers by choice have generally been viewed by society--laypersons and professionals alike. Single mothers by choice, according to the rules governing social science, have been miscategorized and lumped into the deficit single-parent perspective with other single-parent families who achieved their structural status through somewhat more traumatic changes in lifestyle rather than by choice, one of the rules governing the single-mother-by-choice activity.

One major influence effecting the utilization of the deficit perspective with the single-mother-by-choice variant lifestyle is the adherence to the forces of origination of the alternative as the sole mode of explanation for its existence. The forces of origination are comprised of structural (technological) and cultural changes impacting family structure and functioning. Structural (technological) changes include (a) the Industrial Revolution, which altered a family-operated home-based economy to individual participation in the workplace isolated from home (Becker, 1960); (b) the Demographic Revolution, which increased a woman's life expectancy with proportionately less time available for childrearing (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1985; Glick, 1975); (c) the Biological Revolution, which allows choice in parenting through birth control and artificial insemination (Houseknecht, 1987); and (d) the Communication Revolution, which allows rapid diffusion of diverse ideas for women in making life decisions (Houseknecht, 1987). The cultural changes were as powerful in impacting family structure and functioning as the technological changes and include: (a) the national swing from a community orientation to an obsession with

personal freedom (Bellah, et al., 1985); (b) the high rate of divorce which elevated single parenting to a more normative level (Price & McKenry, 1988); (c) a "marriage squeeze" which created a shortage of available men of traditional marriageable age for baby-boom females (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1985; Glick, 1975); and (d) opportunities for increased education and employment for women spurred by the Women's Movement (Gillespie, 1977; Hewlett, 1986; Hock, et al., 1984).

Merritt and Steiner (1984) contend that the number of women choosing the single-mother-by-choice lifestyle will increase. They estimate that in 1978 over 40,000 babies were born to single women in their thirties, and this was a 15 percent increase over the number of babies born to this same population in 1968. This lifestyle is also sufficiently widespread to warrant a national organization called Single Mothers by Choice, Inc., which boasts an evergrowing national membership. It is apparent that something other than the forces of origination are contributing to this growth. This study was an attempt at a more refined and contemporary explanation for the single-mother-by-choice lifestyle, which incorporates the rules governing the single-mother-by-choice experience, by focussing on concepts (Merritt & Steiner, 1984) appropriate for classification as forces of persistence. Included as forces of persistence in this study were: (a) personal characteristics of the single mothers by choice shaped by culture (sex-role orientation and locus of control) influencing the social exchange childbearing decision-making components which include the desire to parent and the importance of professional concerns; and, (b) structural factors impacting the social exchange childbearing decision-making process components which include economics and availability of social support systems.

PURPOSE

The major aim of this study was to determine whether single mothers by choice differed significantly from inwedlock mothers (the standardly accepted model of parenting) regarding their childbearing decisions. The childbearing decision-making process in this study utilized Merritt and Steiner's (1984) social exchange conceptualization and involved (a) the desire to parent, (b) professional concerns, (c) social support systems, and (d) economics. This was accomplished through a comparison of single mothers by choice with an inwedlock mother sample. (The term "inwedlock" was utilized to emphasize that the entire process of conception, pregnancy, and parenting for the married mothers occurred within the same marital relationship. The term "married" was not viewed by the researcher as conveying this emphasis as strongly as "inwedlock" did.) Using single mothers not by choice as the comparison group was rejected by the investigator because of the probable bias of that sample group, i.e., unplanned teenage pregnancies, lower socioeconomic status, and the obvious developmental ramifications involved with the inclusion of adolescent mothers. Also, by choosing a comparison sample of inwedlock mothers as defined within this research study, the preservation of choice in the marital status and the parental status of each sample population was controlled to a greater extent.

FORCES OF PERSISTENCE: THE CHILDBEARING DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Cultural Forces

- (a) Desire to Parent Social Exchange Component

Both sex-role orientation and development of locus of control are results of the socialization process experienced primarily within the family context through overt and covert expectations and modeling based on society's traditional concepts of inevitability, well-being, and efficiency (Trebilcot, 1982). According to Trebilcot (1982), the core of femininity is nurturance, whereas the focus of masculinity is mastery.

Sex-role orientation research, in fact, has major implications for women who desire to parent. Early sex-role orientation research indicated that masculinity, rather than femininity alone or in combination with masculinity, is the "predominant correlate of mental adjustment" (Nevill, 1977; La Toree, 1978; Deutsch & Gilbert, 1976; Jones, et al., 1978; Silvern & Ryan, 1979). More pertinent to the purposes of this study, however, is the application that it is not the conjunction of masculinity and femininity that serves as the correlate of psychological adjustment in new mothers (Bassoff, 1984). Rather, it is the masculine component which acts as the predominant sex-role correlate of psychological adjustment in new mothers, enabling a mother to adapt the mothering role to her own needs (Welburn, 1980). The demands of new motherhood include the abilities to make decisions, take risks, be strong and even forceful at times, act independently, and take a stand when appropriate--in other words, a mother must possess those traits traditionally associated with masculinity (Bassoff, 1984). Those women who are most adjusted to childbearing are: (a) those who do not see motherhood as their sole personal life focus; (b) those who have more differentiated and open appraisals of themselves and other people; (c) those who do not model themselves after an ideal, selfless, and perfect mother image, although they are able to call on a good mother role model

with which they can identify; and (d) those who do not experience themselves as passive, the cultural stereotype of femininity (Welburn, 1980).

The concept of locus of control seems particular pertinent to the gender issues presented above. There are three major sources of exposure contributing to the development of locus of control: (a) social discrimination; (b) prolonged incapacitating disability; and, the best inference (in that it is grounded in the most research), (c) parent childrearing practices (MacDonald, 1973). Locus of control may develop internally (one exhibits instrumental goal-directed activity) or externally (one exhibits emotional non-goal-directed activity) depending on the type of parenting one experienced as a child. Those individuals identified with high internal locus of control were exposed to parenting characterized by autonomy and achievement striving, whereas those individuals identified with high external locus of control were exposed to parenting which emphasized dependency, hostility, aggression, harsh discipline, overprotection, and a view of a controlling and threatening world (MacDonald, 1973). MacDonald states that all of the research studies have one identical conclusion: "people are handicapped by external locus of control" (p. 170).

Based upon the recent research which contends that a mother's sex-role orientation is a core determinant of better adjustment to new motherhood and greater psychological health in general during the child-rearing years, and based upon the goal-directed manner by which the single mother by choice has adapted the parenting role to her own needs, it is necessary to ask whether there are significant differences between single mothers by choice and inwedlock mothers on scores of sex-role orientation and locus of control. This sex-role orientation and locus of

control research superficially appears to categorize a pro-choice motherhood orientation as a strong pull towards bearing children.

(b) Professional Concerns Social Exchange Component

The results from sex-role orientation research also impact on a mother's professional concerns. Pistrang (1984) conducted a study focusing on the effects of employment on a mother. She found that "high work involvement was associated with less positive experiences of motherhood" for non-working mothers; these women tended to feel more irritable, less important, and more depressed. They had lower self-esteem and reported greater costs of motherhood, less intrinsic satisfaction from motherhood ... than did low-work-involved [non-working] women." At the same time, low-work-involved working women, who viewed having a child as a necessary life goal leading to personal fulfillment, reported more satisfaction from motherhood than did the high-work-involved working mothers. According to Pistrang, "...for these women, the attainment of motherhood may have led to greater positive changes in how they felt about themselves and greater intrinsic satisfaction from motherhood.... Low-work involvement was associated with traditional sex-role attitudes."

It is necessary to evaluate differences between single-mothers-by-choice and inwedlock mothers regarding this component to determine whether professional concerns act as a push away from or a pull toward bearing children.

Structural Forces

(a) Social Support Social Exchange Component

The social support system is composed of those individuals whom the mothers perceive as loving, caring, and helpful in "cushioning the individual against the harmful effects of stressful events and facilitating physical and psychological well being and effective role performance" (Colletta, 1981, p. 243). Kahn and Antonucci (1980) quantified social support based on affect, affirmation, and aid. They saw social support as emanating from a personal network of family, friends, and others. Kahn and Antonucci define the affective element as expressions of liking, admiration, respect, or love. Affirmation is defined as expressed agreement or acknowledgment of the appropriateness or rightness of an act or statement of another person. Aid consists of direct assistance given, including money, information, time, etc. Members of the individual's social support network are those on whom she relies for support and who, in turn, rely upon her. Social support includes not only directly measurable objective data, but also relies on the individual's perception of the implied support (Caplan, 1964; Cobb, 1976). If the social support is not perceived as helpful by the recipient, then the purpose of the support may be defeated.

Several examples of social support not perceived as helpful were presented in the Merritt and Steiner (1984) study, although social support was not empirically quantified. Some women stated during their interviews that the aid provided by "so-called helpers" was worse than no help at all; there were women, however, whose relationships with their own parents solidified as a result of sharing their childbearing and childrearing experiences with their families. Other women claimed that the presence of family helpers decreased their personal sense of control. A few women found support from community medical professionals more valuable

than family helpers, whereas others stated that the treatment they received was modified by their marital status; if they had been married, their degree of authority would have been increased during the association with medical professionals. Merritt and Steiner (1984) noted, however, that the majority of women in their study turned to a maternal role model (whether it was their own mother or not) in an informal mentoring relationship.

Buccolo and Bienstock (1988), in their study of 102 single mothers, also found that women with many friends were the best adjusted. Having family members nearby did not promote better coping; they encourage dependency.

It is necessary to evaluate differences between single-mothers-by-choice and inwedlock mothers regarding this component to determine whether social support acts as a push away from or a pull toward bearing children.

(b) Economic Social Exchange Component

Economics plays an important role in determining how strong (or active) a mother's social support system needs to be in terms of aid. Working women, in general, receive a smaller percentage of the dollar that a man earns in equivalent positions (Hewlett, 1986). Thus, a family which must depend on a woman's salary alone may not fare as well economically as families in which the father is the breadwinner or in families with dual-worker parents. In addition, women as a group have traditionally occupied those positions which pay less and have less status attached to them.

The cost of raising a child can be overwhelming. As a child grows, its needs change and expand which drives the annual expenditure of raising that child even higher (Price & McKenry, 1988). In other words, as a child develops the annual financial investment in that child increases. This factor may play a role in the decision-making process as to whether to have more than one child, or even the first child, especially when the breadwinning parent's employment outlook in terms of upward mobility or expansion is limited. This aspect of having a child may also be economically devastating to a family who gives birth to a special needs child. Economics may well play a pivotal role in a woman's personal cost/benefit analysis of having a child. The actual costs of having and raising the child may well outweigh the perceived benefits of becoming a parent.

It is necessary to evaluate differences between single-mothers-by-choice and inwedlock mothers regarding this component to determine whether economics acts as a push away from or a pull toward bearing children.

METHODS

Participants

The sample used in this study consisted of (a) 12 single mothers by choice from the state of Ohio who were single at the time of conception, at the birth of the child, and continuously up until the time of the study, and were between the ages of 20 and 44 years at the time of conception; and (b) 18 inwedlock mothers from the state of Ohio who were married to the father at the time of conception, at the time of birth of the child, and continuously up until the time of the study for at least 3

years, and were between the ages of 20 and 44 years at the time of conception. The geographical restriction controlled, to some degree, the cultural variation that would have been present in a national sample (e.g., problems encountered in trying to compare liberal California with more conservative Texas). This geographical restriction, however, negatively impacted the maximum size of the possible sample population. The age restriction eliminated the bias of unplanned teenage pregnancies from the sample. All participants were Caucasian and all experienced natural births.

The mothers in both sample groups volunteered to participate in response to: (a) advertisements in Ohio academic newspapers; (b) participant recruitment flyers posted in major Ohio college and university offices, and pediatrician and family therapy practices; (c) personal contact with members of a single mother support group; and (d) participant invitation letters mailed to women accessed through the Ohio mailing list of Single Mothers by Choice, Inc. Because of concerns for anonymity, the data collection process was designed to prevent the researcher from knowing who had participated and who declined. The voluntary aspect of sample inclusion undoubtedly biased the results. Personal characteristics or societal pressures, which inhibit the articulation of the single-mother-by-choice status, may thus not be reflected in the results of this study.

Single mothers by choice and the inwedlock mothers had to have demonstrated either one of two levels of choice in becoming a mother, active choice or passive choice. The level of choice was identified by the mothers themselves through a self-selection process into the various categories based upon the definitions provided to them. Women of both sample groups who had demonstrated after choice were eliminated from the

study. This restriction preserved the pro-choice element of both the parental and marital status in each sample group.

Instruments

The effects of the cultural forces of persistence of sex-role orientation and locus of control were compared through: (a) masculinity and femininity scores on the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974) to arrive at significant differences between each sample population's sex-role orientation, and (b) the total score on the Internal Control Index (Duttweiler, 1984) to arrive at significant differences between the strength of each sample population's internal locus of control.

The Bem Sex-Role Inventory is a paper-and-pencil, self-report, Likert-type inventory (with a 7-point response set) that measures, at the individual level, the specific tendency of people to describe themselves according to sex-typed standards of desirable behavior for men and women. Results can be calculated for individuals and for research sample populations. Limitations related to the utilization of the BSRI include the fact that the results are the self-perceptions of the individuals completing the inventory. Sex-role behaviors of the subjects may, in reality, be quite different from the paper-and-pencil results. Reliability of the instrument is good (the alpha coefficient for the masculinity scale is .86, and for the femininity scale is .80-.82). Validity was obtained through several administrations of the inventory.

The Internal Control Index (ICI) is a paper-and-pencil, self-report, 5-point Likert-type questionnaire. The 28 items are based on those variables that appeared most salient to internal locus of control: cognitive

processing, autonomy, resistance to influence attempts, delay of gratification, and self-confidence. Two underlying attitudes were found to be present in all items: self-confidence (confidence in one's own ability) and autonomous behavior (behavior that is relatively independent of social reinforcement or social pressure), both of which are integrally related to sex-role based characteristics and/or behavior. Limitations include: (a) the fact that the results are the self-perceptions of the individuals completing the inventory, and (b) the sole validity for this instrument, at this point in time, rests on its reliance on theory. Reliability of the instrument is good, based on several administrations of the instrument, with alpha coefficients ranging from .84-.85.

Identification of the significant differences between sample populations regarding structural forces of persistence was accomplished through a comparison of each sample population's scores on the social support measures on the Norbeck Social Support Questionnaire (NSSQ) (Norbeck, et al., 1981, 1983) and through identification of diverse trends exhibited by the sample populations from pertinent questions on the demographic portion of the questionnaire.

The NSSQ evaluated the availability of social support systems through three differences in kind (affect--expressions of love and affection; affirmation--expressions of agreement with one's actions; and aid--direct material support), amount, and source, as well as the mothers' personal economic conditions. The four pertinent categories of contact sources included: mother's family of origin, the child's father and his family, community, and mother's circle of friends. For the purposes of this study, losses from the network were not evaluated in terms of recency--the past one year--but rather in terms of the period from concep-

tion or initiation of adoption to the time of the study. With this minor word adjustment, it was not necessary to assume retroactive continuity of the responses. Validity and reliability of the questionnaire was determined through a test/retest administration of the instrument. Reliability and consistency were both rated as high.

Data Analysis

This study was designed to determine the impact of the cultural and structural forces of persistence on the social exchange decision-making process components of a single woman's decision to become a mother. More specifically, in order to preserve the nature of pro-choice in both the parental and marital status, this study compared single mothers by choice with inwedlock mothers in terms of: (a) the cultural persistence forces of sex-role orientation and locus of control on the social exchange childbearing decision-making components of the desire to parent and professional concerns; and, (b) and the structural persistence forces on the social exchange childbearing decision-making components of economics and availability of support systems.

The self-reported responses were analyzed using one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) and a series of one-factor multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA). The independent variable was type of motherhood (single mother by choice or inwedlock mother) for all analyses. The dependent variables included combinations of (a) masculinity and femininity scores on the BSRI; (b) internal locus of control score on the ICI; as well as (c) the affect, affirmation, aid, or total functioning scores; the number of current sources of contact scores; the amount of affect, affirmation, or aid provided by subcategories of the total number of current sources of

contact (i.e., mother's family of origin, child's father and his family, community, or mother's sphere of friends); the duration of relationships with contact sources score; the frequency of activity with contact sources score; the presence of loss of social support score; and the amount of social support contributed by the lost sources of contact score as measured by the NSSQ.

The alpha level of significance was set at .05. Because the sample populations had unequal memberships, the Scheffe post-hoc test was utilized. One necessary cautionary note is that, due to the small sample sizes and the number of dependent variables utilized for certain analyses, the possibility of making a Type II error was increased. Although the sample sizes do present the major and most serious limitation in this study (created, in part, by the geographical restriction necessary for the analysis of the cultural factors), this study serves primarily as an impetus for further research. It is in this spirit, particularly because the results do appear to support trends in the literature cited regarding the affects of the dependent variables in other research populations that the reader should proceed.

FINDINGS

The data support the suggestion that forces of origination have begun to give way to the forces of persistence regarding the existence of the single mother by choice. As would be expected, the one area in which the most significantly different results were expressed was that dealing with the importance of marriage, at conception ($p < .0005$) and currently ($p < .0005$), for the study participants of both motherhood groups. Marriage was "very important," both at conception and currently, for the

inwedlock mothers. Marriage, for the single mothers by choice, however, was rated as "not very important" at either point in time. If the forces of origination were in operation, one would expect that the importance of marriage scores for the single mothers by choice would not have been that different from the inwedlock mothers, if all else were equal.

Cultural Forces of Persistence

Based on the research claiming that positive adjustment to motherhood appears to be rooted in the masculine and/or androgenous components of sex-role orientation, single mothers by choice may be viewed as more well adjusted and mentally healthy than the deficit perspective of single parenting indicates. Not only were there no significant differences ($p = 0.2089$) between single mothers by choice and inwedlock mothers on femininity scores on the sex-role measures, which demonstrates the preservation of the core of nurturance; but the single mothers by choice scored significantly higher ($p < .05$) than inwedlock mothers on masculine characteristics, the predominant correlate of psychological adjustment and self-esteem in new mothers.

Although both motherhood groups exhibited mean scores on the Internal Control Index above the normative mean, single mothers by choice scored significantly higher ($p < .05$) than the inwedlock mothers on the total score for this instrument. Both groups thus had a high degree of internal locus of control, but the single mothers by choice were higher still.

The high internal control scores for both motherhood samples may possibly be interpreted in conjunction with other data from the questionnaire as follows:

- (a) Both motherhood groups expressed exactly the same levels of self-rating as parents--"good" to "excellent"--as well as similar levels of self-doubts as mothers--"sometimes" to "never". These two motherhood groups were thus alike in their feelings about being a mother and how they perceived their personal parenting circumstances.
- (b) A great majority of the mothers in each sample utilized active choice in their decision to become mothers, thereby demonstrating that they fit their roles as mothers to their own needs through choice. In the single-mother-by-choice population, no one utilized the path of adoption, which may suggest that the entire process of mothering is valued--not just the experience of parenting a child. In other words, the single mothers by choice seem to express similar desires as the inwedlock mothers in becoming parents; the path which would provide less disruption to work patterns, etc., was not taken by any of the single mothers by choice as long as the natural birthing process was attainable.
- (c) Single mothers by choice expressed a somewhat less positive evaluation of their childhood years (only one-third reported being "happy" or "very happy"), and a greater perceived degree of responsibility shouldered as a child (two-thirds reported "quite a bit" or "too much") than did the inwedlock mothers. Of the inwedlock mothers approximately two-thirds reported being "happy" or "very happy" during their childhood years, while slightly more than one-third reported "quite a bit" of responsibility shouldered as a child. According to the literature on locus of control, highly internally controlled individuals are generally the products of higher internally controlled socialization (parental childrearing which stresses

achievement striving and autonomy) and this may be where the significantly higher locus of control mean score for the single mothers may have its most profound meaning.

- (d) Single mothers by choice scored one full educational level ahead of the inwedlock mother group at each quartile percentage point, although the minimum for both motherhood groups was at least some college with no degree or vocational/technical training beyond high school. This is also supported by the age at conception differences between the two populations. Single mothers by choice were older at the time of conception than were inwedlock mothers. Although 75 percent of the inwedlock mothers were at most only 25 to 29 years of age at conception, 75 percent of the single mothers by choice were, at the minimum, 30 to 34 years of age at conception. Although it may present difficulties for an inwedlock mother to attend school after having a child, the difficulties are magnified for a single mother by choice. The educational and employment involvement would have had an impact on postponement of the first conception for single mothers by choice.
- (e) Almost all of the single mothers had met or exceeded their career aspirations, whereas this held true for only half of the inwedlock mothers. Almost twice as many single mothers by choice were current students as compared to those in the inwedlock sample. Since the single mothers were farther ahead educationally to begin with and a greater proportion of them are still pursuing higher levels of education, it can be projected that the gap between these two motherhood groups regarding fulfillment of career aspirations will only widen.

As expected, More single mothers by choice were currently employed than were inwedlock mothers. Most of the employed single mothers by choice were employed on a full-time basis, whereas most of the employed inwedlock mothers were employed on a part-time basis. Jobs held were considered more important by the single mothers by choice; nearly all of this group reported their job as "important" to "extremely important" compared to half of the inwedlock sample. These single mothers by choice were highly work involved and had an employment status congruent with their interest--a finding consonant with an interplay of masculine characteristics and high internal locus of control.

Structural Forces of Persistence

The two motherhood groups did not have significantly different social support systems in terms of levels of affect ($p = 0.3139$); affirmation ($p = 0.2783$); aid ($p = 0.8459$); or total functioning ($p = 0.3912$)--total network properties based on affect, affirmation, and aid. The two motherhood groups did not have significant differences in the total number of current sources of support system contacts ($p = 0.2479$). There were, however, significant differences in the number of current sources of support system contacts from the subgroupings of: (a) child's father and his/her family ($p < .005$), and (b) the mother's sphere of friends ($p < .05$). Stated simply, the single mothers had a significantly larger pool of friends than the inwedlock mothers did. This result is in accord with the research findings of Buccolo and Bienstock in which single mothers with many friends were the best adjusted (the significantly higher scores on masculine sex-role orientation and internal locus of control scores for the single mothers by choice), while having family members nearby does not

necessarily promote better coping (the significantly larger pool of in-laws for the inwedlock mothers in conjunction with their significantly lower scores on masculine sex-role orientation and internal locus of control).

Another area exhibiting significant differences were the sources of affect, affirmation, and aid in several instances. Single mothers by choice received significantly more expressions of affect ($p < .05$) and affirmation ($p < .05$) from their sphere of friends than the inwedlock mothers did. What is of greater importance, is that inwedlock mothers did not score significantly higher regarding receipt of expressions of affect ($p = 0.8298$) from the child's father and his family (their husbands and in-laws). This may be the result of differing definitions of what constitutes expressions of love and affection between spouses. A husband may consider his expressions of agreement with his wife's actions and his willingness to monetarily provide for his family as expressions of love and affection, and his wife defines expressions of love and affection quite differently. Aid, as determined by child's father and his family, was significantly higher ($p < .05$) for inwedlock mothers than single mothers by choice and this was the sole significant difference between the sample groups in terms of aid.

In summary, affect, affirmation, aid, and total functioning were not significantly different from those of the nuclear constellation of the inwedlock mother. The only significant differences were that the single mothers by choice got these tangibles and intangibles from different sources in several instances (affirmation and aid) than the inwedlock mothers did (from friends rather than spouses and in-laws).

The quality of the relationships in terms of duration and the amount of interaction single mothers by choice have with these traditional

and alternative sources of affect, affirmation, and aid do not differ significantly ($p = 0.2543$ and $p = 0.3612$, respectively) from those of the inwedlock mother sample. The alternative sources of contact for the single mothers by choice also do not differ in terms of the nature of the resources; the alternative contact sources still are drawn from personal, rather than community, arenas. Single mothers by choice do not experience significantly different amounts of lost social support from lost sources of contact in their support networks, although a slight trend in that direction may be apparent ($p = 0.06$).

CONCLUSIONS

The greatest degree of difference between single mothers by choice and inwedlock mothers appeared to exist within the effects from the cultural forces of persistence (sex-role orientation and locus of control) on the social exchange childbearing decision-making process components (desire to parent and professional concerns) rather than within the effects from the structural forces of persistence on the social exchange childbearing decision-making process components (economics and social support systems). Single mothers by choice exhibit a pull toward one of the culturally-based components of the childbearing decision, the desire to parent. The other culturally-based component, fulfilling professional concerns, does not act as a push away from bearing children for single-mothers-by-choice. This occurs because of their: (a) equivalent levels of feminine sex-role orientation with inwedlock mothers; (b) significantly higher levels of masculine sex-role orientation than inwedlock mothers; and (c) significantly higher levels of internal locus of control than inwedlock mothers. The structurally-based components of the childbearing

decision (economics and availability of social support systems) do not act as pushes away from the decision to become a mother for this group of single women. Social support systems do not differ significantly between single-mothers-by-choice and inwedlock mothers in any aspect other than financial aid from the child's father and his family (a finding that was not at all unexpected). Economically, the single-mothers-by-choice were all employed and were more highly educated as a group than were the inwedlock mothers, with a large majority continuing to pursue even high levels of graduate education.

Based upon the results of the analyses in this study, it appears that it may no longer be appropriate to group single mothers by choice with other single-parent families demographically or theoretically. The single-mother-by-choice lifestyle should not be assumed to be a stressful family experience from a deficit perspective. Based on this exploratory study, this family structure appears to function well, seems to accomplish what needs to get done within the family without the husband/father role being present (the modelling of both feminine and masculine characteristics by the single mother by choice), makes adjustments in social support systems where necessary to achieve goals and to meet needs, and (according to locus of control theory and research) socializes its family members "internally" (achievement striving and autonomous locus of control).

This study, however, is only an exploratory effort to determine the dynamics of this lifestyle. Replication of the study with larger samples is an obvious necessity. It would also be beneficial to be able to compute a full range of interaction between motherhood groups and age categories on data gathered. This would provide a useful developmental perspective between motherhood groups and some additional insights into persistence

characteristics versus origination characteristics of the single-mother-by-choice lifestyle.

Characteristics of single mothers by choice and inwedlock mothers are not the only important facets for study. Parenting behaviors themselves need to be analyzed. Studies should be conducted which focus on ongoing caretaking behaviors, rather than idealized stated objectives (which may be what is reflected in this study), between single mothers by choice and inwedlock mothers. Mothers' perceptions of their behaviors may differ from their actual behaviors.

The methodology utilized in this study should be applied to other "by choice" parenting lifestyles, specifically the "childless-by-choice" married woman. This lifestyle is also one which reflects a dual choice--the marital status and the parental status are both chosen. It would be useful to determine whether all variant lifestyles for women in which this dual choice has been exercised have any commonalities or significant differences regarding self-perceptions of sex-role orientation, locus of control, and social support systems.

The nature of the reported "very" to "extreme" closeness between single mothers by choice and their children may be deserving of further research endeavors. In this study, 100 percent of the single-mother-by-choice sample had only one child. It would be useful, from a therapeutic perspective, to determine whether there are greater degrees of enmeshment (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981) or undifferentiation (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) in these families than in the families of inwedlock mothers who reported the same degree of closeness but with a larger number of children on the average in addition to a spouse. Of special consideration in this research

would be the higher levels of masculine characteristics and external locus of control orientation being modelled by the single mothers by choice.

Educators, researchers, and therapists need to be more aware of the differences between various single mother populations in order to eradicate misconceptions of the women who choose the single-mother-by-choice lifestyle, and to ensure that discriminatory practices do not exist based upon incorrect perceptions of the abilities of these families to function through strength and skill. If it is of value to avoid episodes which both: (a) provide a disservice to the single-mother-by-choice population and their families, and (b) create a compromise of the professional's mission to provide the best care possible suited to each client to the best of that professional's ability, the trends in this study must be taken seriously and further research must be performed in order to achieve a realistic view of this expanding population.

Based upon this study, it is possible that single mothers by choice are preserving the core of nurturing traditionally attributed to femininity, while assuming the masculine characteristics of controlling nature (singly making their own reproductive decisions and using modern technology to attain their goals), serving as leaders in society (choosing a non-normative lifestyle) and as leaders in the family (choosing to be a single head of household); and overcoming structural obstacles to achieve their ends and maintain a functional family environment (economics and social support variations). Only future research will tell whether this is a fair and accurate evaluation.

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